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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the role, importance and characteristics of sports in students' lives at the University of Debrecen. We wish to point out that sport constitutes a social subsystem, which has an important function in society as a whole. According to former researchers, half of high school students, one-third of university students and only a quarter of young people between the age of 25 and 30 do sports regularly. That is why it is important to examine the socio-cultural and social factors that affect sporting habits, whether this involves student sport activities during university studies.

For the analysis, the database of the latest research of the Center for Higher Education Research and Development (CHERD) is used, namely The impact of Tertiary Education on Regional Development (TERD). Our results include that (1) male students do significantly more sports than women; (2) the family's financial situation, (3) the level of mother's education, and (4) the type of settlement influence students' sport activities. (5) Those students who take part in sports activities have significantly more friends than those who do not, which represents the social and community impacts of sport.

Key words: physical activities, sport, higher education, social relationships, social-cultural factors

Absztrakt

Dolgozatom célja, hogy bemutassam a sport szerepét, jelentőségét és jellemzőit a debreceni egyetemisták életében. Szeretnék rámutatni arra, hogy a sport mint társadalmi alrendszer milyen fontos funkciókat tölt be a társadalom egészében. Az eddigi kutatások eredményei szerint a középiskolások fele, az egyetemistáknak már csak a harmada, míg a 25-30 év közötti fiataloknak csupán a negyede sportol rendszeresen. Éppen ezért fontosnak tartom megvizsgálni, mik azok a szocio-kulturális és társas tényezők, amelyek hatással vannak arra, hogy egy egyetemista jár-e sportkörre/edzőterembe egyetemi tanulmányai során.

Kutatásom során a Felsőoktatási Kutató és Fejlesztő Központ (CHERD) TERD kutatásából származó adatbázist használtam fel. Az elemzések során azt az eredményt kaptam, hogy szignifikánsan több férfi hallgató sportol, mint nő; a család anyagi helyzete, az anya iskolai végzettsége, és a településtípus hatással van arra, hogy egy hallgató jár-e sportkörre/vagy sem az egyetemi évek során. A sport társas és közösségteremtő hatását mutatja az az eredmény, hogy azoknak a hallgatóknak, akik járnak sportkörre, szignifikánsan több barátja van, mint azoknak, akik nem.

Tárgyszavak: sport, felsőoktatás, társas kapcsolatok, fizikai aktivitás, szocio-kulturális tényezők.

The role and importance of sport in students' lives at the University of Debrecen¹

A sport helye és szerepe a debreceni egyetemisták életében

Introduction

According to Bourdieu (2002), sport sociology as a science has to overcome several difficulties: it is despised by both sports sciences and sociologists alike. Athletes are very well aware of the practical side of sport but they are not able to enter into academic discussions about it, while some sociologists are not familiar with the practical side of sport, are not willing to do sports but mention it as a social subsystem.

The 'Campus-life'² aims at mapping the groups and communities of students at the University of Debrecen. One of the most important and largest groups is the community of athletes, including competitors and leisure activity groups. According to Ágoston Nagy, the ex-president of the University Sport Department, there are about 10 000 people — including required physical education participants — at the university, who exercise on a regular basis. Therefore, by keeping the pursued the objectives in mind, it is essential to present the most important features of university sports life and all the factors that might impact whether or not students attend sports events.

This study aims to introduce (1) the most important functions of sport in society (and at the University of Debrecen), (2) the role of sport in MA/MSc students' lives at the University of Debrecen, who are becoming the next generation of intellectuals, (3) the social-cultural factors that affect whether or not a student does sport activities. The problem is that half of high school students, one-third of university students, and only a quarter of young people between 25-30 do sports regularly (Fábri 2002). University / college education is the last chance for most students to submit themselves to acquire the positive attitude related to healthy lifestyle and regular sports, before they get into the labor market.

The analysis was made by using the database of the latest research of the Center for Higher Education Research and Development (CHERD), namely "The impact of Tertiary Education on Regional Development (TERD)"³. The survey was completed by 456

MA/MSc students at the University of Debrecen in spring 2010. By analyzing the database and website of the Department of Sport, we wish to present (1) the most important characteristics of sport life at the University of Debrecen, (2) students' sporting habits, (3) the most important social-cultural characteristics, which may affect that they do sport or not. Besides we also analyzed (4) whether there is a difference between athletes and non-athletes in terms of the number of friends. Besides the survey database, we used available documents about the sport life of the University, and the information from the interview made with Ágoston Nagy, the former president of Sports Department.

The study forms part of an exploratory research where we wish to define the main research questions and hypothesizes for the further investigation. In this essay relationships are only described, their explanation is to be undertaken in a further phase of the research. As I used an existing database from a previous survey, thus the scope of subservient variables is restricted. However, the analysis offers several useful pieces of information and can serve as a good base for further researches with all its limits.

1.1. Defining sports

From Huizinga (1995) to the European Sport for all Charter a wide variety of definitions were formulated to capture the essence of sport. As society as a whole has renewed from time to time, so do sports as a subsystem: some elements disappear and others become emphasized in it. The numbers of ancient Greek games, which sometimes resulted in death, cannot be compared to nowadays' professional sports, which are sometimes heavily infiltrated by business. It should be emphasized that today sport is not simply a leisure activity but forms the part of lifestyle, thus sport activity has an impact on social status. Therefore, sport or the lack of it, the place and form of physical activity affect individuals' position in society, and as a result, the entire social structure.

Lately, the health maintaining and recreational functions of sport became more relevant in the essence of sports, however, the boundary between competitive and leisure sports is emphasized to a greater extent (Szabó 2009). Here, we apply the broadest interpretation of sport to determine who does sports on the Debrecen University Campus, thus we used the definition of European Sport for All Charter. According to it, sports are every form of activities, which develop the physical, mental performance and social relationships. It can

be done alone or in community (Dóczy 2008). Who is considered an athlete in the sociological sense at the University of Debrecen? The survey of TERD-research includes the following research question: *During your university studies have you ever participated in sport activities (in sports club or gym) on or off-campus?* We considered athletes as those students who indicated yes to having been participants in sport activities within or outside the university, including those students who regularly visited the compulsory physical education lessons as well. They can be classified as the athletes since it is a unique opportunity for a lot of students to do regularly physical activity in organized form, with the same group of people, on a regular basis. If such physical education classes were not available, these students would not do sport most likely due to their demanding obligations at the university.

1. 2. The social functions of sports

There are a lot of functions of sport in society and the most important functions are the following:

- **Health care, prevention, recreation function**
- **Cultural, value, moral function**
- **Diplomatic, economic and infrastructural function**
- **Community creating and social function**

In our study and the Campus-life research the last one is the most important. Sport plays a central role in the development of relations between people, thus it poses a significant impact of communities. Joint exercises, joint work, working together towards a common goal require collective behavior from athletes. Compliance with the rules, joint participation in competitions, supporting each other, a group of inclusion, mutual trust, common goals are the results of the joint efforts of individual members (Bíroné 2004).

2. The most important features of sports life of the University of Debrecen

In this chapter we wish to present the most important features of sport life at the University of Debrecen with the help of document analysis and the interview with Agoston Nagy.

The 10th § of university's regulation sets out the obligations of students in physical education. In the Bachelor program 2 semesters, in the Master program 1 semester, in the traditional training system 4 semesters of physical education have to be fulfilled to obtain a diploma. Professional athletes and students with health problems can receive dispensation by presenting a certificate.

Physical education courses, sports events, programs, etc. are organized by the Department of Sport, which is directly managed by the rector's office. The Department of Sport's website informs students about sport opportunities and obligations. The website introduces sport sections, teams, tournaments, results, current sport events as well, and notifications are sent about these through the university's electronic learning system, Neptun. In addition, it presents the organizational system of the Department, the functions and positions at the university, the aims, coaches, teachers, managers etc. Since 2007, a quality of life program has been started, which has similar goals as the Department of Sports does.

Based on the health care function and the social functions, there is a particular emphasis on students'. The short-term goal formulated by the institution is to organize students' compulsory and extracurricular physical education once a week at the university and the long-term goal is to improve students' state of health and physical condition. Depending on the level of students' condition from the basics to preparing for competition, different sport opportunities are offered. Experience has shown that regular sport activity is beneficial to students' academic achievements; and shared trainings bring together students (Nagy 2007).

The Department of Sport organizes programs, events, where students can undergo the common experiences together that can be obtained by sport. I should point out from these the swimming day, running day, Buzánszky Football Cup, the tours, trips, skiing camps and many more. The Department is contacted with sport centers and gyms around the city, so almost every type of sport can be tried: if a type of sport cannot be found at the university, the department directs the students to the place where it is available.

The Athletics Club of University of Debrecen (DEAC) has functioned since 1919 and it is responsible for operating the competitive sport of the university. It supervises 22

sections: table tennis, athletics, bridge, DVSC-DEAC (football), futsal, handball, women basketball NLI, men basketball NLII, football, volleyball, chess, orienteering, ladies skittles, men skittles NLII, women tennis NLI, men tennis NLII, badminton, hiking, swimming, sailing, fencing, and aerobics.

The sport fans may resort to sport opportunities offered by the university in various sport centers, grounds, halls. In every sport center of the university, there is a physical education group, where its members assist students to choose the most appropriate disciplines, in order to achieve a positive experience by physical education lessons, which will encourage them to do regular exercise of their lives henceforward.

3.1 Hypotheses

The theoretical background of the research links to Bourdieu's capital theory (Bourdieu 1991). According to Bourdieu, the way someone spends his/her leisure time and within this how he/she does any sports depends his/her position in society. People from the upper class have totally different taste from the working class, and it can be explained not only by their different financial resources. The habit of the given social group effects mainly the way of spending their leisure time. He says leisure and sporting habits are influenced by three factors: free time itself (that is a changed form of the economic capital: higher economic capital is associated with more free time); economic capital and cultural capital. Depending on their level of proportion by each class, the ways of spending leisure time and sporting habits change. In addition, the habit affects not only the ways of leisure but it is also a distinctive sign of social classes, so it determines and strengthens identity. For example, the taste of upper classes can be characterized by such exclusive activities as sailing, playing golf or taking photos, while typical middle class activities include team sports as playing basketball, handball, but boxing, bodybuilding and wrestling are spread among working class. Obviously, there are always exceptions, that is, we cannot say that a certain activity is done only by a special social class.

According to Featherstone, those social groups who have high economic (upper class) and cultural capital (intellectuals) are able to tell what can be seen as legitimate, valid and pure taste. The validation of legitimate taste is materialized through the addition and

investment of cultural (learning, knowledge of high culture and arts), economical (money) and symbolic capitals (self-reflection, behaving). The consumption of working and jobless classes are determined by gratifying and getting their basic necessities, contrary, the preferences of the middle class are characterized by trendy goods influenced by the amount of economic capitals (financial resources) and cultural capitals (the knowledge of fashion and style).

Previous studies showed that women, lower educated people, youngsters in worse financial conditions and those who live in rural areas do less sport. In our research, we wish to examine if the difference between genders exists among students at the university and what is more, the effect of financial status as economic capital and the education level of their parents as cultural capital on the regularity of students' sport activity. According to Ifjúság 2008 (Youth 2008), the regular sport activity of young people living in a county seat has significantly increased, so we aim to examine if the type of settlements where students arrive from effect their sport activity at the university. The number of friends as contact capital is also investigated as possibly serving as an influential force. According all the above, we posed the following hypothesizes in connection with students' relationship towards sport and the effects of sport on social relationships:

- 1. There is a difference between male and female students in terms of proportion of sport.*
- 2. Students' relation to sport is affected by their families' social and cultural status.*
- 3. Permanent residence impacts whether a student does sport or not at the university.*
- 4. Students who take part in sports activities have more friends than those who do not.*

3.2 Examined variables

To examine the first hypothesis, we analyzed the proportion who do sports among boys and girls at the university and whether there are significant differences related to this.

To examine the social-cultural background following Bourdieu's capital theory, we

examined the influence of parents' qualification (cultural capital) and their objective financial status (economic capital) on their children's sport activity. To determine families' financial situation we formed an objective, complex variable, which comprised the questions related to the technical equipment of the household and possession of certain assets, including the following items: apartment, house, vacation home, personal (desktop) computer, internet subscriptions, Hi-fi, air conditioning, home theater, car, plasma TV. If the respondent answered "yes" to a question, got a point, if the respondent was in the possession of two properties or more, two points. Thus, the maximum obtainable score was 20. We examined the average scores developed among student groups of attending sports activities, and not attending. At this point we were not able to include more variables into the analysis, in the further part of the research we wish to study students' socio-cultural attitudes from more points of view.

To study students' permanent address, we examined whether they had arrived to the university from a farm, a village, a smaller town, a county seat, the capital or from any other township. We reduced the possible answers into a ternary variable: village, town and city.

To test the last hypothesis, we studied whether there is connection between sport activities and the number of students' friends. The number of best friends was also examined from several aspects in the survey. In the research, we used those questions that alluded to deeper, more personal relationships. Those variables were used to search the relationship between sport activity and companionship, which asked the number of friends in the following situations:

- discuss study-related problems
- share private life problems
- leisure time regularly spent together
- discuss plans for the future
- visited/called you in case of illness.

4. Research results

The results showed that 33% of the students replied that they did not do sport, 31.6%

within the university, 28.8% outside of the university and 6.6% within and outside the university had some kind of sports activities (Figure 1). The latter three cases were consolidated, so we got dummy variable. Overall, two-third of students do sport in some form, one third does not.

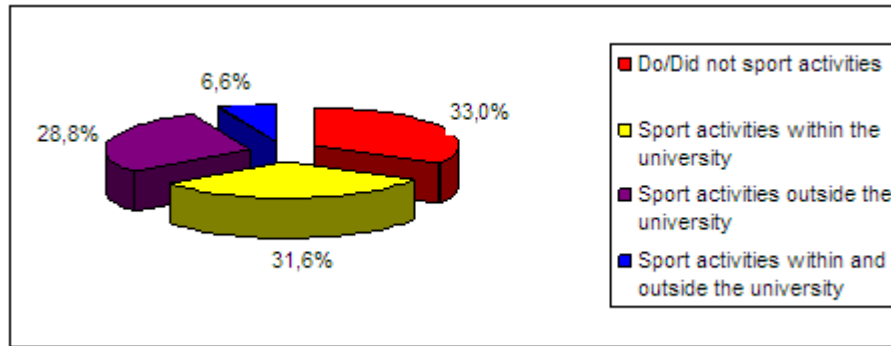


Figure 1: The percentage of students' sporting preferences
(Source: TERD 2010, N=456, own construction)

4. 1. The relationship between gender and sports readiness

The first research hypothesis was that there is a difference between male and female students in terms of their sporting habits. The assumption has been proven because there was a significant*⁴ difference found between athletes and non-athlete men and women.

While only 64.3% of women, 75.2% of men answered that they had some kind of sports activities on campus (Figure 2). Therefore, it seems that sport is more popular among men than women, despite the increasing importance of fitness/wellness.

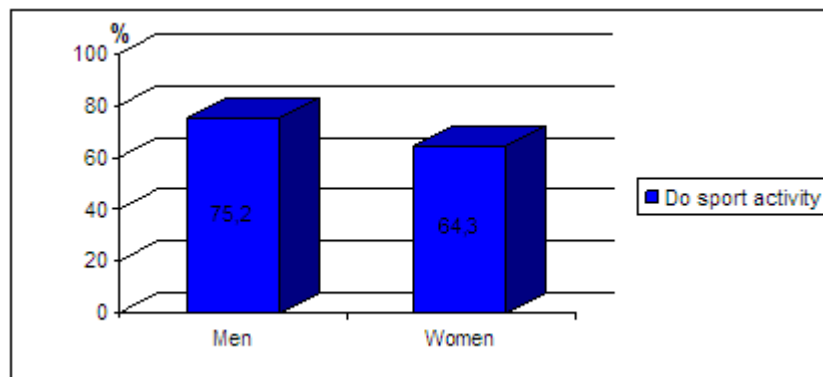


Figure 2: Sport willingness by gender
(Source: TERD 2010, N=456, own construction)

4. 2. Relationship between students' sporting activity and family income

To determine families' financial situation, and thereby economic capital, we formed an objective, complex variable. We examined the average scores developed among two student groups: that of attending sports activities, and the other of not attending. The ANOVA test shows that there is a little, but significant* difference between students' groups of attending and not attending sport activities related to families' financial situation. However, this difference does not even reach one point (Figure 3). Consequently, financial situation does not really, or at least not directly affect students' sporting habits. Therefore, we must agree with Fábri (2002) in that the university significantly balances existential differences that are present between students in sports, physical activity opportunities (also). Thereby we conclude that the first part of the second hypothesis is proven: the objective financial circumstances of the students' families have an impact on whether they do any sports or not.

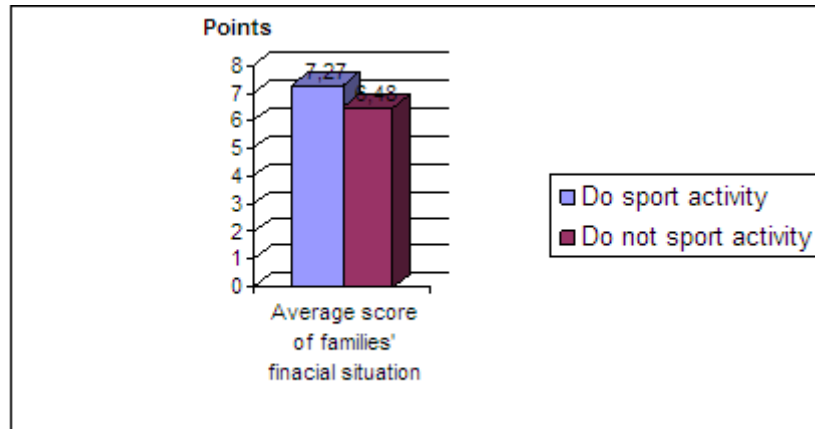


Figure 3: Mean of the family's financial background of sporting and non-sporting students
(Source: TERD 2010, N=456, own construction)

4. 3. The influence of parents' education level on child's sporting habits

The influence of students' cultural capital on their sport activity (whether they do any sport or not) was not measured by the qualification of their parents. By analyzing the impact of parental education level we found a very interesting trend that exceeded. We examined separately the educational level of mothers and fathers and the relationship to their children's sporting habits at the university (Figure 4). According to fathers' educational level, we have not found a significant relationship. The tendencies of the

results show that the higher educational level of the father attracts a greater proportion of sporting students. While among the children of fathers with primary educational level the proportion of those who do sport is 63.8%, this number is 66.1% with the children of fathers with secondary education level and this ratio is 72.7% among students with fathers of higher educational level.

Even more interesting that a significant* correlation was found between the educational level of mothers and children's sporting willingness. In this case, the referred tendency among fathers also applies but the differences between education levels are more striking. The sporting children's proportion of primary school graduated mothers is 51.3% (which is more than 12% less compared to similarly educated fathers!), in the case of secondary school graduated mothers this ratio is 67.4%, while in the case of higher education graduate mothers, it is 72.1%. The latter two cases are almost entirely identical to the observed data of fathers.

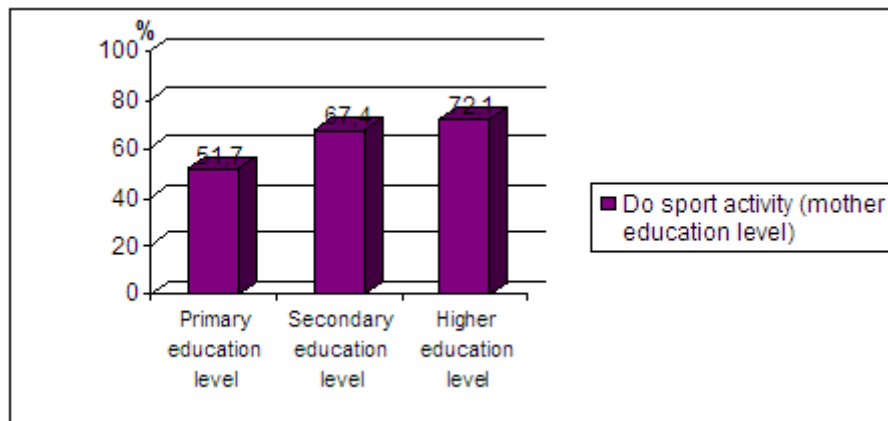


Figure 4: Percentage ratio of sporting students per mothers' education level
(Source: TERD 2010, N= 456, own construction)

According to Pusztai (2008) in the literature related to the school success, the mother is the dominant member in her child's learning results. Sewell and Shah (1968), Stevenson and Baker (1987) and others presented the same results.

The results show that the form of leisure activities outside of school, and sports as a part of it are influenced by mothers' educational level to a greater extent than fathers'. The explanation of this is that mothers deal more with children's leisure time, and the same

applies to education, thus they have a greater affect on leisure habits. Thus mothers provide a pattern for children, that they inherit: if sport is important for the mother, then the child will be encouraged to do so, however, if sport does not or cannot play a role in the mother's life, it will not be in the child's life either. Low-educated mothers, who possess low cultural capital, have limited opportunities for regular physical activity, and this could be transferred over to children as well. It has been shown that higher social status - such as higher education level - provides better opportunities for sport, and a greater need of a health-conscious lifestyle. Consequently, the second part of the hypothesis was partly confirmed: mothers' education level influences their children's sport activity: whether they do any sport during their university years or not.

4. 4. The effect of the place of residence on students' sporting habits

The third hypothesis has assumed that the type of residence from which students come effect whether a student will or will not do sport at the university, which is situated in a big city. The results show that the larger the original town where the students come from, the larger the proportion of people who do sports at the University of Debrecen (Figure 5). An explanation in the background may be that the smaller villages and cities have poorer infrastructural possibilities in sports: there are less sport complex and facilities, there are fewer possibilities to try out or practice several sports, which was also justified by Laki and Nyerges (2001). However, it is important to mention that it does not mean that less physical activity would be typical, because several people live in a detached house and the cleanup of the garden and court is considered as a significant physical activity. Accordingly, the third hypothesis demonstrated significant* relation in connection with permanent residence and willingness to do sport.

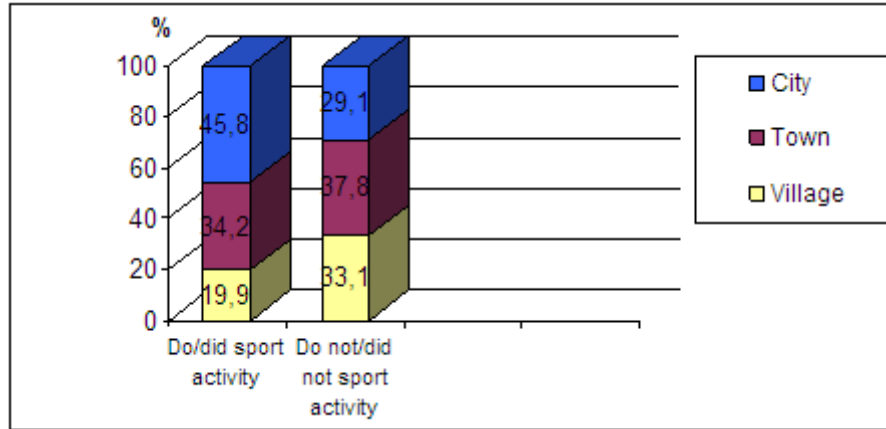


Figure 5: Distribution of sporting students according to the type of settlement
(Source: TERD 2010, N =456, own construction)

4. 5. Friendship connections among athlete and non-athlete students

Our research hypothesis was that those students who do sports in some form have more friends as compared to those who do not. In every tested dimension of friendship, the average number of friends was higher among sporting students than non-sporting students (Table 1).

Table 1: The average number of friends in the different dimensions of friendship among sporting and non-sporting students (Source: TERD 2010, N =456, own construction)

	How many friends				
	can you discuss the study-related problems with?	can you discuss the private problems with?	can you fill your leisure time together?	can you discuss your plans for the future with?	visit/called you in case of illness?
Do/did not sport activity	4,46	2,32	2,97	2,97	2,56
Do/did sport activity	4,74	2,83	3,83	3,56	3,20

We found no significant difference in the number of friends among sporting and non-sporting students in the dimension of study-related problems⁵. A possible explanation is that most study-related problems are discussed with study group mates who may not be

considered as friends. Thus while spending their free time – for example during sport – they try not to focus on learning problems. As far as the other dimensions are concerned, we found significant** difference in the number of friends. Thus it is obviously proven that sport has community and interpersonal influence, which can be principally utilized in individuals' private life and free time. The practice of sport is a way of earning friends who may stand always by us in the most difficult moments, may help us to solve problems; therefore sport is one possible form of social capital.

Summary

During our research, we aimed to chart the habits and local colors of sport life at the University of Debrecen and the sport habits of students. We concluded that significantly more men do sports than women. The type of settlement and the financial status of the family have an effect on whether students do any sports. According to the parents' qualification, the rate of sport-doers is increasing with higher levels of education and we found significant difference in the willingness for sports regarding mothers' qualification. All in all, the major factors determining social status have great effects on whether individuals do any sports, and as a consequence, those from disadvantaged social background are at risk in the field of sporting possibilities. All these support the theory of Bourdieu, that is, the frequency, method and content of sport activities are different in the various social classes.

We wished to catch the community-building effect of sport by the number of athletes' friends. We found that athletes have significantly more friends than non-athletes. Therefore we managed to demonstrate that sport has a community-building effect due to its social nature. During common activities or efforts, we can make more friends who we can rely on in other fields of life if we are in difficult situations.

As a next step in our research, we form hypothesizes that explain the above mentioned relationship. It is also important to examine how sport can influence health conscious lifestyle among students at the university and their well-being, and how sport can effect educational achievement and performance of these students.

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³ The TERD research was supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (T-69160), between 2007-2010, the leader of the research was Tamás Kozma.

⁴ * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .000$

⁵ We used Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test.